



LIVESTOCK

MOSES ORGANIC FACT SHEET

Pasture and Living Conditions for Organic Ruminant Animals

On February 12, 2010 new organic regulations were introduced incorporating quantifiable measurements for tracking the pasturing of ruminant animals during the times of year when grazing is possible. The new regulations also offer further clarification on ruminant animal living conditions.

When will this new rule be enforced?

Operations that are currently certified organic will have until June 2011 to fully comply with the changes required by this new regulation. Any new operations that become certified after February 2010 will need to comply with all requirements of this regulation immediately. The National Organic Program, in their Q and A concerning this rule, have stated that they intend to enforce this regulation rigorously. In their words “There would be no point in having a specific metric if it is not enforced” The NOP has also stated that if environmental or other conditions do not allow for a farm to meet the requirements of this rule, then certified organic livestock cannot be produced at that location.

Basic Requirements of this Pasture for Ruminants Regulation

Thirty percent of the dry matter intake of ruminant animals is to be provided from grazing (this is when an animal breaks off forage from a living plant whose roots are still attached to the soil, green chop transported to the animals is not pasture) or from forage that has been cut and is still laying in the pasture as “residual forage.” The minimum time of the grazing season in a calendar year is 120 days. This can be broken up into more than one time period, it need not be continuous. Farmers must manage their animals in such a way as to allow the animals to achieve this amount of dry matter intake from pasture, such as not providing large amounts of feed right before being let out of the barn, as well as allowing them out on pasture for enough hours per day to graze.

In addition, there are some specific documentation requirements to ensure that this requirement can be verified by the inspector and certification agency. Many certified organic farmers already provide this documentation, so there should not be a lot of new paperwork for those who already have a complete organic system plan. The documentation necessary includes a description of the total feed ration for all ages and types of animals on the farm, including all feed

produced both on and off the farm, the percentage of each type of feed and feed supplements fed to each age of animal (corn, small grains, beans, forages, pasture etc.) in the total ration, and changes to the rations made throughout the year in response to the use of grazing as part of the ration. This 30% dry matter intake from grazing for 120 days in a calendar year is the minimum, organic farmers can choose to have higher numbers than these when managing their organic ruminant livestock.

Feeding Areas during the Non-Grazing Season

When there is no green forage growing in the fields (in other words, it is not the grazing season), yards, feeding pads and/or feedlots can be used for access to the outdoors and feeding, as long as the area is large enough to prevent crowding and competition among the animals for the feed provided. Continuous total confinement of ruminants of any species is prohibited, period. There is no requirement for sacrificial pasture to be used during these non-grazing times of year, although it would be allowed if the soil and water quality are not endangered. These non-grazing season exercise and feeding areas can be concrete or dirt, but must be designed and managed in such a way as to prevent environmental contamination from runoff. Frequent removal of wastes is one method to prevent this contamination, and also serves to promote animal health and well-being.

Organic Bedding Required

All “roughage” used for bedding, which is any agricultural product that the animal might consume, must be certified organic. Wood shavings or sand are not typically consumed by animals and are not agriculturally produced, these do not need organic certification. But straw, corn fodder or cobs, hay, soybean stalks or any other item of this type must be organic in order to bed organic animals. Organic livestock feed crops grown by exempt from certification operations (under \$5000 a year in organic sales) cannot be fed to certified organic livestock. Exempt producers have the option to become certified and then access the market for selling their organic livestock feeds.

Temporary Confinement

Lactation is not a stage of life that would allow confinement, and thus not an exemption from the grazing requirement. The allowance for confinement of ruminants includes sorting or shipping livestock for sales or confining animals for



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up to one week before they would be shown at a fair or demonstration (ie. 4H). Cows that are being dried off may be confined for one week at the end of their lactation period, and cows may be confined for up to three weeks before freshening, as well as one week after freshening. Cows may be confined for short periods during the day for milking, with the organic system plan incorporating a milking schedule that will ensure sufficient grazing time to meet the dry matter intake mandated in this regulation.

Dairy calves may be confined up to six months of age, and after that must be on pasture during the grazing season and can no longer be individually housed. During that six month period the confined calf must have freedom of movement within their confined area, no tethering where they can't lie down or move about freely. Fiber animals such as sheep or angora goats can be confined for short periods to enable the producer to perform shearing activities.

Regulations for Finishing Beef - 60 day public comment period

While the vast majority of this regulation is effective immediately, with an allowance for existing producers to come into compliance by June 2011, the portion which addresses the finishing of beef animals is open for comment for 60 days until April 13, 2010. This section of the rule allows for beef animals to be held for up to 120 days in feedlots or yards. For smaller ruminants, the finishing period cannot exceed one-fifth of the animal's total life, or 120 days, whichever is shorter. *However, if the finishing period corresponds with the grazing season, these animals must still be maintained on pasture*, but without the 30% dry matter intake from grazing requirement. Producers, consumers and others should provide information to the National Organic Program if they support this allowance for the 4 month confinement of ruminant meat animals, or if they feel the rule should not allow this.

Pasture Management and Recordkeeping

The management of pasture is to be included in the Organic System Plan, and is considered a crop like any other on the farm. The management of the pasture should not lead to soil erosion or water contamination, the health and vitality of the pasture should be sufficient to provide the 30% dry

matter intake required for their entire herd. Irrigation can be used, if available, to encourage healthy regrowth of the pasture during the season, and the pasture should be managed in a way that minimizes the spread of diseases or parasites among the animals grazing those pastures. If there is not sufficient pasture to meet this rule, maintain the health of the animal and the vitality of the pasture, then improved pasture management or a lower stocking density should be put in place. While European and Canadian organic standards have stocking rates for each class of animal, our regulation has not done this, in recognition that various climates and management strategies can have higher or lower stocking rates and still meet the minimum requirements for sufficient feed and a healthy environment. This rule does not require fencing to protect streams from erosion that could be caused by grazing cattle, but producers still must rotate their pastures and/ or upgrade their stream access areas to protect water and soil quality.

Each pasture location must be identified in the organic system plan with maps, similar to all crop fields. The plan and maps should detail the type of grazing (mob, rotational, etc.) used on the pastures, the amount of pasture per animal, the duration of the grazing season, as well as all permanent fences (moveable or temporary pasture fences not included), shade areas and water sources present. Protection of natural wetlands and other environmentally sensitive areas should be described in the operator's pasture plan. A description of the feed ration and the grazing aspects for all ages of animals should be included, as described earlier.

Resources to Learn More

The National Organic Program is working diligently to implement this regulation across the U.S., with worksheets for farmers and others to calculate the various aspects of dry matter, helping them with rotational grazing stocking rates and more. Q and As are also available on the NOP website. <http://www.ams.usda.gov/AMSV1.0/nop> - click on pasture regulations.

MOSES also has a link to this information on our website, www.mosesorganic.org

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Visit www.mosesorganic.org for more resources and tools, including our Organic Resource Directory and the Organic Broadcaster Newspaper. Plan to attend our annual Organic Farming Conference in February. To find upcoming events including MOSES trainings and field days visit our web calendar at: www.mosesorganic.org/events.html

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